



Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie

Background

Approximately 60 miles southwest of Chicago sits a landscape that is the last of its kind. Established in 1996, the Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie is the first national tallgrass prairie in the country.

This remnant prairie land once housed part of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant. In 1996, the Department of Defense parceled 19,161 acres in a land transfer to the U.S. Forest Service. Since the transfer, the U.S. Forest Service along with other federal & non-governmental partners manage the restoration of this historical prairie habitat.

The Forest Service, community partners and countless volunteers have been actively restoring Midwin from industrial and agricultural lands to native tallgrass prairie since 1996, with the first 5,000 acres opening to the public in 2004. Today, more than 13,300 acres of Midwin are open to the public.

As the largest piece of protected open space in northeastern Illinois, Midwin offers a unique opportunity for the region's residents to connect with nature and their public lands.

- 30 miles of trails: 21 miles of multiuse trails for hikers, bicyclists and equestrians and 9 miles for hikers only
- 149 species of birds utilize the prairie for nesting, breeding or overwintering, 108 of which are permanent residents
- Illinois' largest breeding population of endangered Loggerhead Shrikes
- 18 endangered or threatened species, 40 aquatic species, 23 species of reptiles and 27 species of wild mammals

Midwin is pronounced "mih-DAY-win" and is the Potawatomi name for their "Grand Medicine Society." The Potawatomi Grand Medicine Society were healers and leaders who kept the greater Potawatomi society in balance. This sentiment is echoed in the current use of the name to represent healing the natural world and providing balance to our urban, technology-filled lives.

In 2010, the National Forest Foundation partnered with the U.S. Forest Service, local conservationists and other groups to spearhead the restoration of 2,000 acres at Midwin. Activities included removing drain tiles and roads to restore the prairie's natural hydrology, removing ammunition bunkers left over from Midwin's past, and planting native prairie plants.

Additionally, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Forest Foundation, and other partners have prepared 1,030 acres at Midwin to host an experimental herd of American bison. The last time bison were seen in Illinois was in 1808. This experimental herd is being closely studied to learn how the bison can aid in native prairie restoration.



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Areas of Midwin open to the public can be accessed from 4 am to 10 pm daily.

Welcome Center
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Twitter: @MidwinNatTP

Visitors are encouraged to stop at the Welcome Center for current information, maps and advisories.